Dear Dave, re Greg Stone's suicide and what follows 2/4/91

In a sense this is a mea culpa, I address what may occur to you when you read the enclosed memo on Roger Feinman's phone call of last night. I do it now because it is too early to phone Cyril. And I want to do all relating to this matter before I return to the terrible clutter on my desk and reading and correcting the -rologue to The King Conspiracies draft. My mind doesn't shift gears as fluidly as once it did.

To begin with I had no questions at all about Garrison. He struck me as a typical DA from what at first appeared in the papers. When I began to have some questions I still thought this way and then I believed that what I regarded as excesses were his fighting fire with fire. Sylvia was more perceptive. From almost the first she regarded him correctly as an Any Rand character. She also went too far, and this is probably what deterred my reassessment of him and what he was up to. And example is her giving that terrible person, Thornley, a contribution of $100 for his defense.

Earlier I made a serious mistake about critics in general. I presumed that while there would inevitably be disagreements in detail, we would all be genuine and without ulterior purpose. So, after Sylvia's glowing description of it before it was out, I began prejudiced in favor of Epstein's inquest and before I read it, when Viking's Tom Gervasi gave me a copy and asked me to help him promote it (at the annual American Book-sellers' Association convention in the Shoreham), I did all I could to be helpful. Typically Epstein wasn't there. He avoided any kind of contention, with a rare exception when he later did very well against Lane in California. For example, if he knew, Epstein was not cooperating in the promotional efforts, so he had nothing to do with the docments added to the paperback reprint. I directed Gervasi to them. So much for Lifton's great "discovery." Which I'd earlier directed Paul Hoch to and Paul was probably Lifton's original source, not the multitudinous xeroxes Viking distributed to promote the paperback.

So, we all make mistakes. As I told you, I'd told Greg some time ago, not later than our first conversation after I read the Spy Spag ms., not to trust him, that he was trying to stake out a claim to own the political assassinations, how awful and irresponsible The Murkin Conspiracy is, too, and I may well have told him that if he questioned my judgement, to ask you. If I did not tell you this, perhaps I should have. But I did not anticipate anything like happened even being possible. I had no such suspicion at all, although I did feel, as I think he later told us both, that he felt burned out.

An aside: he is the second of Lowenstein's devoted student helpers who could not take the pressure. The other one killed Lowenstien. I hope there are no others of whom I do not know.

In retrospect, and we can always see looking backward what we did not see looking ahead, I believe that Greg's call to you just before he killed himself was when he was considering changing his will to cut Melanson out. If this is true, you have no reason to exonerate yourself because you also had no reason to anticipate the tragedy. You softened what you said because you perceived that Grag was troubled by something and did not want to trouble him more, Melanson being one of his associates. I'm sure that if he had given you any indication of his real state of mind or his possible purpose or if he had told you what I told him, you would have been as blunt as I was.

There is something we can and I believe should all learn from this: we should under all the conditions I can now think of put forthrightness first, it and truth, and when asked opinions, under most circumstances should say what we think. In a sense I am not in a position to seem to lecture on this, and I do not intend to be lecturing, because when a Baltimore Sun reporter asked me about Livingstone's High Treason, I told him that I did not want to comment on it. Livingstone is a Baltimorean. (And as I've just learned, educated as a lawyer and an authentic and decorated hero as of his law-school days.) It probably was not possible for any of us, not knowing his state of mind, to have done anything to discourage Greg, but we might have kept that authentic bastard Melanson from corrupting Greg's fine work and misusing it to promote himself. And now I'll see if Cyril is on. After again saying that if in retrospect you can see what I consider possible, do not blame yourself. Best to you all, Harold

Harold